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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000126

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SUBJECT: GUEBUZA LAMENTS CAUSES OF CIVIL DISORDER

REF: MAPUTO 120 & MAPUTO 124

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Todd C.Chapman, Reasons 1.4(b) & (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: President Guebuza called in the Charge February 6 and said that poverty and a lack of security were the main causes of recent protests in Maputo. Guebuza said the GRM has a good program to combat poverty, pointing with appreciation to many joint efforts with the USG, but expressed frustration that progress was not being made more quickly. He also stated that his police force was inadequate to deal with the current protests. When asked for input on these subjects, the Charge encouraged the President to accelerate work on strengthening Mozambique's business environment to attract employment-generating investments. The appearances of a government lockdown on media, a bungled GRM communications strategy, and an ineffective police response to the protests all reveal GRM weaknesses. The GRM's capitulation to protester demands may also encourage similar, violent tactics the next time the government takes on an unpopular action on a broad-based social issue. The President, lamenting the root causes of the current protests with the Charge while they were still ongoing, without offering any clear prescriptive actions to resolve them, was puzzling at best. END SUMMARY.

Protest Appeared Loosely Organized...

¶2. (C) The violent protests in Maputo on February 5 against increases in bus fares evidenced at least a minimal degree of preparation and organization. The protest only started after the morning rush hour had commenced, thus magnifying disruption. Road blockades focused first on key thoroughfares within and to the city before spreading to secondary routes. Roving bands of protesters maintained contact with each other via mobile telephone and text messages. Even so, there was no defined leader or indication of a hierarchical organization behind the planning.

...Government Response Wasn't

¶3. (C) The GRM seemed taken unaware by the ferocity of the protests. Police response was generally disorganized, ineffective, and haphazard. Unusually, the GRM, which regularly calls upon the armed forces (FADM) during peaks of crime, did not activate any units until the afternoon of the second day of protests. In a tape-delayed radio address on February 5, the Vice-Minister of Interior unhelpfully threatened to order the police to open fire on protesters unless order was restored. Government-aligned TV and radio stations appeared to adhere to a near-blackout on information about the protests as they were happening, broadcasting regular programming until evening news shows carried

sanitized coverage with an appeal for calm. Late in the evening, the government and the bus union agreed to return fares to their original, lower levels. A government spokesperson said that while efforts to raise prices were a valid response to transportation companies' increased fuel costs, riders' concerns about higher fares were also valid. A union representative told Embassy officials that there would be a three-day "cooling off" period while the two sides negotiated next steps, so as to avoid a strike by bus drivers protesting the lower fares.

Opposition Reaction Muted

14. (C) In Beira--Mozambique's second largest city--the mayor Davis Simango (the highest ranking elected representative of opposition party Renamo) met with bus drivers prior to the implementation of the new rates. The drivers and mayor agreed that the new rates would not be implemented; in effect agreeing to let the market dictate the outcome of increasing fuel prices. As a result, there has been no disruption or protests in Beira. On the other hand, Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama visited northern provincial communities affected by recent flooding February 5 and made no on-record comment about the protests. While the protests do not appear to be politically motivated, nor is there any indication of it being an attack directed at the Frelimo party, Renamo officials made no attempt to make political capital from the government's uneven response.

President Guebuza Shares His Frustration

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15. (C) On February 6 President Guebuza called in the Charge to discuss the protests. Appearing relaxed and calm, Guebuza said he saw two major problems fueling the protests. First, continuing high levels of poverty provided a small group of organized protesters an opportunity to exploit a broader group to participate in criminal acts. Guebuza said the GRM has a good program to combat poverty, pointing with appreciation to many joint efforts with the USG, but expressed frustration that progress was not being made more quickly. He said the GRM wants to encourage more foreign investment, noting an ongoing effort to promote 'Open Skies' in Mozambique aviation as one example, and said the solution was clearly to increase employment opportunities and to stimulate the private sector. Second, Guebuza said, security remained a major challenge. The President, seemingly disappointed in his own government, admitted that his police force, with limited resources and training, was woefully inadequate to deal with the current protests. He asked if the Charge had any ideas on these two subjects.

16. (C) The Charge agreed with the President that increasing employment opportunities via the private sector was key to reducing poverty levels and social tensions. He encouraged the President to accelerate work on strengthening Mozambique's business environment, especially the indicators which contribute to the World Bank's "Doing Business Index." The Charge pointed to Georgia's recent success in quickly improving its business climate and attracting substantial foreign investment. While many U.S. investors are considering new opportunities in Mozambique, he continued, others seeking to implement projects in country, like Chiquita Banana, still view GRM bureaucracy as a major hindrance. These are the investors who can create the employment the President was seeking, he said. The President agreed, noting that he also discussed the Doing Business Index recently with the World Bank and asked for the Bank to identify three things that could be done immediately to improve Mozambique's ranking. The Charge added that the USG was certainly open to dialogue on a broad range of economic

issues, including Open Skies. Noting that the USG had limitations on the support provided to the police, the Charge assured that the USG support for training programs at the national police academy would continue.

COMMENT: Worrisome Precedent for the Next Protest

17. (C) The past two days revealed many GRM vulnerabilities and a widespread underlying frustration felt by many impoverished Mozambicans. The protests against rising transport prices, seemingly without a leader and loosely coordinated via mobile phones and text messaging, quickly transformed into pockets of chaos as roving gangs attacked vehicles and police apparently without purpose. The absence of a well-organized political opposition--evidenced by Dhlakama's failure to seize a prime opportunity to criticize the government's actions--leaves disaffected groups no effective political outlet for their concerns except the politics of the streets. The appearances of a government lockdown on media, a bungled GRM communications strategy, and an ineffective police response are all worrisome. The GRM's capitulation to protester demands may also encourage similar, violent tactics the next time the government takes on an unpopular action on a broad-based social issue. Planned increases in bread prices may provide the next flashpoint. President Guebuza's request to meet with the Charge to lament the root causes of the current protests while they were still ongoing, without offering any clear prescriptive actions to resolve them, was puzzling at best.
Chapman